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# Preparing Teachers for Urban Settings: Changing Teacher Education by Changing Ourselves

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### Abstract

This article describes the personal and professional changes experienced by a teacher education faculty who embarked on a joint project relating to urban education. The faculty members committed to write book chapters applying their areas of expertise to the challenge of preparing teachers for urban schools. Using qualitative methodology, this research examined the faculty members' discoveries, thoughts, doubts, and reflections at three points during the project. Results showed an evolving perspective on urban education focusing upon understanding the lived experiences of the children in order to provide meaningful education for them. This study may provide insight and encouragement for other teacher education faculties who undertake projects which "push the envelope" of their comfort levels.

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# **Preparing Teachers for Urban Settings: Changing Teacher Education by Changing Ourselves**

by  
**Colleen Willard-Holt<sup>±</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

This article describes the personal and professional changes experienced by a teacher education faculty who embarked on a joint project relating to urban education. The faculty members committed to write book chapters applying their areas of expertise to the challenge of preparing teachers for urban schools. Using qualitative methodology, this research examined the faculty members' discoveries, thoughts, doubts, and reflections at three points during the project. Results showed an evolving perspective on urban education focusing upon understanding the lived experiences of the children in order to provide meaningful education for them. This study may provide insight and encouragement for other teacher education faculties who undertake projects which "push the envelope" of their comfort levels.

## **Introduction**

As has been amply demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Haberman, [1994](#); Olmedo, [1997](#)) few teacher education faculties have had much experience in urban education. Related to this, perhaps causally, is another well-established fact: teacher education programs have had little success in preparing effective teachers for urban schools (Haberman, [1994](#); Yeo, [1997](#)).

In an initial step to address both of these urgent issues, 12 of 19 members of our teacher education faculty committed to write chapters for an edited book on urban education. Each faculty member was to apply his/her area of expertise to making recommendations for preparing teachers for urban schools. Our institution, and the teacher education program, had had a commitment to urban issues when it had been founded thirty years earlier. Changes in faculty and focus had gradually diminished the emphasis on urban issues, and many of the newer faculty were eager to renew that commitment. Writing this book and implementing an intensive urban field placement were two concurrent steps in this direction.

This project represented a new venture for most of the authors--it was their first foray into such a joint project, and, for many, their first experience as researchers on urban education. By forming a community of researchers, we "entered with other teachers into a 'common search for meaning' in [our] work lives" and came to "regard [our] research as part of larger efforts to transform teaching, learning, and schooling" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, [1993](#), p. 52).

It was important to us as a faculty to chronicle the stages of our own development throughout this process, and to reflect upon individual and collective growth. We also believed that it may

be instructive for other faculties contemplating such work to peer over our shoulders, as it were, as the process unfolded.

With that in mind, we agreed that we would submit ourselves to interviews at the beginning, near the midpoint, and near the end of the research and writing phases of the project, as time and scheduling permitted. Having had much experience in qualitative research methods, I volunteered to conduct and analyze the interviews and write the results. A total of twenty-two interviews, each 30-45 minutes in duration, were conducted. In all but two instances, each chapter author was interviewed at least twice. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed through analytic induction and constant comparative methods. A draft of the final chapter was shared with all of those who were interviewed to obtain their comments on the accuracy of their own quotes and their feedback on the interpretations. Only minor grammatical changes were suggested, and the interviewees agreed on the soundness of the interpretations.

Following, then, is a compilation of our discoveries, thoughts, doubts, and reflections throughout the process of writing this book.

## **Beginnings**

The first set of interviews, conducted as the authors were beginning their reviews of the literature, elicited perspectives on urban education, background information and initial feelings about the project. Thus, as recommended by Fry and McKinney ([1997](#)), we began to effect pedagogical change by confronting our own beliefs and attitudes.

## **Perspectives on Urban Education**

One of my questions in the first set of interviews concerned general suggestions that the faculty members might give to novice educators preparing to teach in urban environments. These initial recommendations arose from background experiences with urban environments and/or children of diverse cultures. These suggestions are shared here so that the reader might gain insights into our predispositions and general attitudes toward urban settings.

[T]he bottom line I guess is that kids are kids no matter where you find them and that all kids are capable and that you need to never assume that kids because of their particular culture or particular economic background can't do things (BD<sup>1</sup>, 8/25, p. 2).

...[E]ducation is about power and that we are all teachers and we are all learners. And I can learn from a six-year-old...[S]tudents, no matter what their age or position in life is, like to have a feeling of self-worth, and that sometimes comes from their ability to contribute to the overall knowledge of the classroom community. I think then it establishes a rapport [based on] mutual respect. I think that my students reacted very well to the fact that I came down to their level. That I didn't know everything and that for those things that I got wrong, clearly it was their responsibility to educate me. Just as it was my responsibility to educate them... (BN, 8/12, p. 2).

An aspect of this commitment to empower the learners was suspending ethnocentrism. Many authors expressed that it is our obligation to be introspective regarding our own cultural

"baggage" and that it is necessary to bracket that mindset when dealing with children of diverse cultures:

I think we have to look at our own selves first. Who we are, what we believe in and why we believe in it before we make rash judgements in the clients' interest. Be honest with ourselves, up-front, look at our own education, see where we're educated, see where we're not educated...(AH, 8/25, p. 3).

I think [preservice teachers] need to look at the culture in which they were brought up and look at leaving their expectations behind and looking at a realistic sense that a lot of the children in an urban setting need to have, especially in early childhood, need to have either a mother or father figure. Someone to love them and care for them...Looking at children's needs as a starting point...They have to look at different cultures, different ways and meanings of things and evaluate them before they actually begin to teach them (TG, 11/6, pp. 1-2).

[Preservice teachers need to learn to] deal with different perspectives. So that they can see the perspective of people who just happen to have a different culture, different way of living, have different values. [People from other cultures] don't do things exactly the way they did with their family (KS, 11/6, p. 3).

I think that probably the significant thing that I could tell our students is the need to not jump to conclusions, not to make quick decisions, but to really carefully think about the students and the environment they're coming from, the issues that they're bringing with them, the cultural expectations that have been fostered within them. In other words you don't bench mark those students against [your] own experiences, but to be good observers, to be good listeners, and if anything else be empathetic toward the situation. Small subtleties as far as children's actions in the classroom are concerned, eye contact issues, shuffling issues, there are certain characteristics that we are able to say are simply part of a culture, whether it's Hispanic culture, or African-American culture, or Asian culture, that we have to be very much aware of. And I don't think we [have done] a very good job of teaching our students that there are some of these subtle differences and that we tend to use our own glasses rather than [look] through the eyes of that culture. And somehow we've got to make them more understanding of that (ST, 8/26, p. 4).

The above statements echo Goodwin's ([1997](#)) recommendation to help preservice teachers examine their own pre-existing assumptions regarding urban schools and urban children. It is apparent that the statements are quite congruent and reflective of a unanimous child-centered approach. It appears from these remarks that the faculty did have, from the outset, similar views on teaching children in urban environments. The knowledge that we shared a common philosophy supported the notion that we could come together to produce a coherent book that would be representative of a common viewpoint. This was one of several motivating factors for participating in this project.

## **Motivations for Participation**

The chapter authors had joined the project for a variety of reasons, and most authors cited more than one motive for participating. Several authors said that this project would assist in their commitment to helping all children to have a successful school experience:

I do believe that most faculty care and do want to make a difference in kids' lives and urban [education] is part of that process (AH, 8/25, p. 1).

I was very moved by Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* and it made me question whether or not I was doing everything I could to help children in this country who are so socio-economically disadvantaged (RP, 8/12, p. 1).

...It's always been an interest of mine in terms of how to reach all types of children...I think if we're going to make some significant strides to make a difference for all kids, this is important (CC, 8/26, p. 1).

As teacher education faculty members, our main way of making a difference for children is through the teachers we prepare. Many faculty members felt keenly the responsibility to educate these preservice teachers about the challenges of urban education:

[We have a] responsibility to meet the needs of the children in urban schools...[My goal is] to steer the initiative home so that we can say that, my goodness, we really are better able now to prepare our students to work in those kind of environments (RP, 8/12, p. 4).

I think it's the teacher's professional obligation to find a way to reach whatever children they are working with (CC, 8/26, p. 2).

I think preservice teachers need to know the difference between urban school settings and suburban and rural school settings and they need to be prepared for those differences in their teaching...I think most of all the project is helping me gain a better insight into those differences which will affect how I teach my students... (TG, 11/6, p. 1).

The need for this differentiation between urban settings and rural and suburban settings has also been well established in the literature. A student quoted in Hood and Parker (1994) summarized the shortcomings of traditional teacher education programs by saying "Most of the approaches to teaching that I have learned here will not work with Black kids. It will work with advantaged groups in the suburbs, but not with city Black kids" (p. 167).

Some authors saw the book dovetailing with another faculty project, in which an intensive pre-student teaching field experience was being initiated at a nearby urban elementary school:

I don't have an urban education background [and] since we're moving into the [intensive urban field] experience...I think this is a real opportunity to explore that (MD, 8/26, p. 1).

It coincides with the intensive [urban field experience]...So writing an urban education chapter is giving me some good insight into what other people are doing and I can try out some of those ideas...as we venture into the intensive field (CC, 8/26, p. 1).

Others not directly involved with that field experience expressed a long-standing personal interest in urban education:

[R]eally it gets back to a long standing interest I've had in urban education that really grows out of our student teachers ... and the problems they are encountering when they come face to face with urban education...(ST, 8/26, p. 1).

I was looking for the opportunity to do a little more research in the area of urban schools (HM, 11/10, p. 1).

...It's just kind of an interest I've always had...that's something I will really enjoy finding out more about (KS, 11/6, p. 1).

Finally, the project represented to some an innovative opportunity to collaborate on a publication with other faculty:

There is very little [published from] teacher educators who work together in urban education...The first reason [for my involvement] is this: the need to work in teacher education and urban education is really important and the second reason is to be connected. [This project] combines the need to work with urban education with, I would argue, the first time for any teacher education department to work together across differences unitedly (AH, 8/25, p. 1).

Frankly I can't see a down side to this project because it brings the faculty together as a community with a shared interest and it also will help us in terms of preparing people to be more successful I think in tenure and promotion reviews (RP, 8/12, p. 1).

Thus, there was excitement at applying our areas of expertise to a somewhat unfamiliar school setting. There was also the anticipation that perhaps our work would have an impact on improving education for urban children, that we would learn ideas which we could in turn impart to our students, and that we as a faculty would become more cohesive as a group with a common goal.

## **Hesitations and Challenges**

Strong motivations toward the project notwithstanding, many began the project with mixed feelings. There were hesitations and doubts on the part of many of the authors, for a variety of reasons. Some of the hesitations arose from the self-perceived lack of authentic and significant experience with urban schools on the part of some authors.

[At] the first few meetings I had the sense that everybody involved had some sense of uneasiness about this because of their relative lack of experience. And I think that was just being honest (HM, 11/10, p. 4).

Although most authors had had quite a bit of experience with diverse cultures, fewer had had significant experiences with urban schools. As a faculty with most of our teaching experience in rural or suburban schools, how could we pretend to be experts in urban education?

I have not really taught in or been involved with or lived in an urban environment...I really don't understand it, can I really write about how to deal with it?...[I]f we're going to put this out there for an audience that is going to use it as a practical application then it has to be honest, it has to be real. It can't be just a surface kind of an issue, it's got to be in depth. I don't feel that I have that "in depthness" yet to write about that (ST, 8/26, p. 3).

I'm certainly not satisfied that I know what it takes to [work in an urban setting]. I really don't know. I know and have a comfort level working with minority kids in the settings I've been in. I

felt my relationships with them were very good. But that's not the same as an urban setting. So, I have a little bit of an uneasiness in trying to come out with what a [teacher in] an urban setting should do and not having experience in it myself (HM, 11/10, p. 3).

Other authors framed differently this issue of limited personal experience in urban setting:

I know people have talked about concerns on whether, being that we're not of this culture, we are trying to prepare our students [who are also] not of this culture and these cultures. And yes, I have some concerns about that, but in writing this chapter I never really thought of it as trying to say something and sound like an expert, when I'm not, to people who are. I've thought of it more as taking my content area and looking at the research that's out there [in urban education] with respect to the particular ideas that I have, and then looking at the implications for that with my preservice classes and getting them ready for the intensive urban field experience (MD, 8/26, p. 4).

Still others were comfortable with the project and their own preparation for it:

...I know that in some group discussions there's been some hesitancy on behalf of some of the writers. I don't feel that sense of hesitancy. I see this as being a very positive opportunity to further define the voice of [my field] in not only the field of urban education but in education itself (BN, 8/12, p. 4).

The issue of background experiences resurfaced during the period of growth and change to be discussed below.

A second aspect of concern for many authors related to the sheer complexity of the entity called "urban education." Issues of cultural diversity and urbanness are often confounded in the literature, and we needed to decide whether or not to separate them. One author eloquently clarified the dilemma:

When I talk in terms of urbanness, I'm talking in terms that are of the situations that occur in an area that is poor in resources, that is very large and sometimes bureaucratic and even not really manageable. Issues that come about as a matter of not having the textbooks in the classroom, not having the proper supplies, not having professional development activities. Those transcend cultural lines. The cultural issues, on the other hand, I think are borne out of, and I'm realizing that more now as I'm doing more research for the book, are borne out of some real basic cultural differences that are socially instilled...So I do distinguish between urban and cultural [issues]. They are two distinctly different aspects. That's what makes this whole thing of writing real, real difficult (ST, 8/26, p. 2).

Another obstacle for us arose in agreeing on a definition of "urban":

I was questioning all urban schools being same--are they all like Kozol described in his books...Is it just any urban setting? Because it's not all the same--it's not one entity. I think what we're talking about is a stereotype of urban schools which are run down and the students are not interested in learning. Teachers yelling at kids, maybe not too interested in teaching anymore. So



I don't want to propagate or continue to stereotype if it's not true. I hope that our book is going to be realistic and one thing I hope to do in my class is to help students realize that if they're going to teach in urban schools there could be a wide range (KS, 11/6, p. 2).

I'm writing basically for Harrisburg, Steelton. That's not Philadelphia, that's not Los Angeles, that's not Chicago, that's different. [Will] we really be able to hit the target if we shoot at this one area?...I don't live there and I don't dare tell somebody about [teaching] in that kind of environment. How do I know how to address that? So maybe I'm really addressing...the urban setting of small size cities and not the large ones (ST, 8/26, p. 5).

Another challenge that we faced was to make the entire book flow. We did not want an edited book which was fragmented and unfocused. Several authors expressed concerns about this:

My concern is how it's going to fit all together...[M]y intent is that the book is cohesive and gels, that whoever reads...the entire book, chapter to chapter, the impression they get is that we're a faculty basically coming from a similar vision and mission (CC, 8/26, p. 4).

This is really exciting to me but I still have a question about how it fits into the rest of the book. And if I'm going on a totally different track than what the intention of this book is (MD, 8/26, p. 4).

Our final, and perhaps most pervasive, problem was that of time and balancing multiple commitments. CC's comment summarizes what many expressed:

On a more individual basis it's just finding the time to do this...(CC, 8/26, p. 4).

So, there was commitment and excitement tempered by hesitation and confusion because of the lack of personal or professional experiences in urban schools, the complexity of the issue, and/or the cohesiveness of the book.. The excitement and commitment appeared to be stronger for most prospective authors, and the next step was to attack the challenges of the project. The next section will describe how we addressed these challenges, and will detail some of our own learning as the project continued.

## **Growing and Changing**

We undertook a number of activities in order to familiarize ourselves with urban education in general and its implications for our areas of expertise in particular.

### **Action Strategies**

All of us began by searching the extant literature. Most of us were somewhat disappointed by what we found, or didn't find:

[B]ased on the reading I've done up to this point it strikes me as though a lot of what's written is written as a generality and I haven't found much in the way of specificity (RP, 8/12, p. 5).

[M]ost of what I find to be recommended philosophically or more practically for urban contexts, really keeps coming back to what constitutes good thinking about teaching, good thinking about

pedagogy in a general way. I'm not finding things jumping out at me that have an urban ed signature. Something that seems to be exclusive [of what would be a] regular suburban type of teaching experience...[The literature] continues to reinforce that first revelation (RP, 11/17, p.1).

I'm still doing reading, I keep finding more, and I'm disappointed, it's nothing really novel. I guess when I initially started this I thought I'd really get an opportunity to delve into some of the research and literature that would provide a lot of insights. But what I've learned so far is [that] quality...instruction is quality...instruction, regardless of who you're dealing with (CC, 8/26, p. 2).

Disappointment at finding little specificity in the literature bolstered the idea that much work needs to be done in the area of urban education. To augment the research of the literature, all of the authors sought experiences with the urban environment in one or more ways: making visits to urban schools, facilitating the intensive urban field experience, and/or conducting interviews of urban school personnel. For the most part, these activities reinforced the ideas that were beginning to formulate regarding how to prepare teachers for urban settings:

I just keep seeing, seeing and hearing things from our students' experience [in the urban field experience] that support, sometimes support and sometimes are different from the kinds of things I read in the Yeo book, for example, and other things that I've read related to urban experiences in terms of a very standardized curriculum, with a very heavy emphasis on accountability for the basic facts which usually get defined as procedural knowledge and skills. And so...curriculums get focused around that. But I think also our students [at the urban school] are seeing that a lot of it depends on how the teacher uses the curriculum. And different teachers do it differently and consequently it has a different impact on kids (MD, 11/10, p. 1).

[The urban field experience] reinforced some of the thoughts and feelings that I've had from my [previous] experiences (TG, 11/6, p. 2).

There was one other activity in which we engaged--meetings to discuss urban education, our topics in relation to the urban setting, and our progress with our work. A number of faculty members mentioned this activity as having been helpful, and wished we had been able to do it more often:

I wish our faculty got together more...I was hoping we would meet every other week to talk about what we had learned, what we had seen. I found that beneficial, so I would recommend to [other faculties engaged in a similar project] to meet as regularly as possible. Also I'm wondering as the chapters come in because we haven't been meeting, are they going to fit together or are they going to look like they are totally unrelated to each other? (KS, 11/6, p. 4).

I think it's really important for people who are writing different chapters to talk with each other about their ideas. That one meeting that we had when we all shared our conceptual ideas of our chapters was very helpful. And I wish we had more of a chance to do that...I think that would first of all let me know what other people are thinking about. But I think it would also help me clarify my own ideas...(MD, 11/10, p. 2).

...[E]very time we meet I get ignited (AH, 11/10, p. 1).

The above activities grounded us in the field of urban education, and impacted our emerging ideas in a number of ways. The next section will describe perceptions of the intellectual growth and changes experienced by some, and the continuing internal struggles of others.

## **Changing Mindsets and Lingering Doubts**

The comments of one faculty member capture the essence of the ideas that were formulating in the minds of many of us—that certain techniques have great potential for success with children in urban settings. This first excerpt came from the initial interview:

...[P]erhaps in looking at different populations or different cultures of students, different ways of expressing themselves may be more conducive to one thing or another and perhaps using these types of activities might allow for some students' voices to be heard that previously weren't getting heard or weren't getting heard in certain ways in a classroom. I'm particularly looking at assessment. If you look at profiles of kids and you're looking at standardized test scores versus looking at what they can do in a classroom, I think you get some different pictures. And that may very well depend on if you're looking at different populations of students (MD, 8/26, p. 3).

In the above, MD described some emerging ideas, not yet completely formulated. In the second interview, based on continued reading and experience in the urban setting, the ideas had gelled:

I think basically...I want to focus on how to prepare preservice teachers but looking at using performance assessment...as sort of alternative ways of allowing kids to show what they know and can do...Part of that ties into paying attention to the culture of the students and incorporating that in [the curriculum] (MD, 11/10, p. 1).

Other authors had modified their initial ideas on their topics to take a more culturally sensitive approach:

I think what I'm starting to see is that the essence...is not developing recipes, quick fixes and a how-to-do-it book as much as it is to begin to talk about the need for understanding such issues as passion, resilience, compensatory kind of skills...I'm getting more to the point of talking about what a person takes into the environment...So if we try to just give our students a whole lot of tricks saying this will work and that will work I think we're setting them up for failure. So we've got to try to turn some of their attitude into philosophy and understanding of the urban setting. It's more knowledge and attitude than it is a skill. That's a change. That's not the way I was approaching it (ST, 11/6, pp. 1-2).

Another author echoed the importance of coming to an understanding of the children and their world:

The biggest factor...is understanding the [children], their background, knowledge, schemas, [and] language acquisition which will have an impact on how teachers can address instruction and assessment in the classroom. So I think that's going to be my main focus...helping the reader understand the significance of the culture of the child [and his] background knowledge and how it has an impact on [instruction] (CC, 8/26, p. 2).

This perspective of seeking to understand the children's culture as a beginning point helped to resolve the issue of the range of settings labeled "urban": it is imperative to treat each school as a unique entity which may or may not share characteristics with other urban schools. The emerging consensus seemed to be to suspend preconceived notions and stereotypes and set out to learn about the culture of a particular school and its population--to begin by treating the situation as an anthropological study. This corresponds to Gilbert's ([1997](#)) recommendation that urban field experiences need to be accompanied by "careful analysis of multicultural and socioeconomic issues in the community in relation to the individual's personal constructs and the community at large" (p. 93), in order to obtain the most positive results.

As we learned about the urban school environment and built relationships with specific schools, the anomalous entity of "urban education" began to assume a more personal and familiar aspect--here again we were simply helping teachers to help children learn. We became more comfortable:

Going into the [project I was] looking at our all white faculty and thinking that made a difference, but since then I've read books and articles and learned white teachers can be successful teachers in an urban setting. So that's not as big an issue. And two, I think through the reading and the visitations, etc. I'm just more comfortable with the idea and topic. And I think I don't see the urban schools as so different anymore...I don't feel so uncomfortable as I thought I might...[A]nd also from meetings we've had and stating that we're approaching it from probably a typical college background in how we're addressing this issue I think that can be a real service rather than taking the point of view that we're the experts. I like that perspective that simply this is the process we're going through and this is what we have learned at this point (KS, 11/6, p. 4).

Thus, our book might be considered a list of action research projects to try in a given setting, which may or may not be successful for that environment. A tentative confidence in our ability to speak to issues in urban education began to coalesce:

The school visits gave me the confidence that what I was writing was on target (KS, 4/18, p. 2).

This confidence was not shared by all authors; at least one author still had continuing concerns regarding the focus of the book:

[It's] really creating in me this dilemma--what is this thing called urban education? How urban is urban?...I can't put [my writing] in the context of Harrisburg versus New York versus Des Moines, Iowa. Yes, the degrees of urbanness, the degrees of the problems they're facing are just so different. When you go to try to address them I'm not sure which one to pick out as my target (ST, 11/6, p. 1).

Although not yet satisfied that the issue was resolved, this author was finding the activities described in the previous section helpful in resolving this dilemma:

But I think in doing what we're doing we're getting a better personal feeling as to which way I would like to go with that. So I'm still at the point of I want to say gathering data but it's not so

much research data as it is helping me to get a mind set in writing about the issue and trying to develop the framework as I organize the writing (ST, 11/6, p. 1).

Other authors still had continuing concerns about their qualifications to speak on the issue of urban education:

I certainly don't want to be prescriptive about things I don't know about. And if I feel that way I would probably be inclined to ask that that kind of work may not be included. At the same time I feel a responsibility to the book editor and to the people who are involved in the project to own up to a commitment that I made...I'm just concerned about the lack of passion that might undergird it because I haven't been as close to the project as I really would like to be. And that's an ongoing frustration...(RP, 11/17, p. 3).

I have this nagging feeling that I may find out at some point as I put this together that it's, that I'm really not capable of doing it and I'm really not being honest about it and if that happens I'm going to say that. I don't intend to put something together that is just words and is somebody's fantasy (HM, 11/10, p. 3).

Thus, some of the authors found the strategies of the previous section more helpful than did other authors in resolving their doubts and hesitations about the project. One obstacle which only seemed to worsen was the pressure of time and competing demands for it. Every one of the authors expressed concern about time, and most expressed guilt at not being further along with their writing.

Even with all the faux pas, foibles, and false starts, the project was eventually finished. One final interview captured the authors' reflections on the process and the finished product.

## **Looking Back**

The final interviews enabled and encouraged reflection on the research and writing as a recent lived experience, and served a debriefing function as well. We began with a rather concrete focus on the chapters themselves.

## **Key Points**

First, I asked that the chapter authors capsule the key points of their chapters:

I think I have presented realistic (because they are field based) suggestions for teachers to consider including to improve...instruction and assessment in their classrooms (CC, 4/13, p. 1).

The greatest challenge as I see it, is to prepare future teachers to "know" that high level thinking and exploring in [content areas] can occur, with all students in all kinds of places, starting in kindergarten, with appropriate knowledge of...content, pedagogy, and curriculum. Part of their preparation is learning these things, challenging old belief systems, and thinking about ways to carry out meaningful... instruction with limited resources (MD, 4/20, p. 1).

...[I focused on how important it is to] change the negative attitudes and beliefs about teaching in the urban schools which preservice teachers seem to hold when they enter teacher education programs (KS, 4/18, p. 1).

[C]hange for urban ed has to come down to altering perceptions of what we think education is versus what it is redefined as in urban areas...[R]estructuring is a mind-set, not only a technical function of the day . . . that areas in teacher ed [are] an on-going and changing process, given the different populations . . . that teacher educators themselves have to take a grip on their own ability to change depending on the types of populations, etc. (AH, 4/13, p. 1).

Coming from a different vantage point, the school director felt that his main contribution was to provide "...action steps administrators might take to galvanize faculty to better honoring of our commitment to educational equity."

Thus, the authors' perceptions of their key points ranged from more concrete, practical strategies for urban teachers to more abstract views of restructuring schools and promoting equity.

## **Reactions**

Next, I asked faculty members to reflect upon the meanings their finished chapters held for them. Generally, reactions to their own finished work was positive:

My chapter has turned into much more than I would have ever expected...It has for the most part been a very positive experience. It really shows how a faculty can come together under less than perfect conditions and produce a work that produces pride among those involved (BN, 4/22, p. 1).

It helped me bring closure to some thoughts I'd had, not only about the chapter itself...but also about some of the other things that are happening in our college with our urban field placements, and maybe what connections exist between those two sets of activities (RP, 7/30, p. 1).

Though most authors were positive about their chapters, there remained some ambivalence:

I still feel like I need to (should have) read more...I think I have learned some from my reading, but in no way do I consider myself an "expert" or even "well versed" to converse about it...I still feel that my contribution is small and I wonder who might be interested in reading what I have to say on this topic (MD, 4/20, pp. 1, 3).

I thoroughly enjoyed preparing for the writing of the chapter, but the final product was not what I had originally envisioned (KS, 4/18, p. 1).

It appears that the authors who expressed this lack of satisfaction with their chapters questioned whether the work had fulfilled their sense of their responsibility to the profession and to the children in urban environments, as so much remains to be done. Other authors clearly saw this work as a beginning step in their understanding of urban issues:

I've developed additional questions pertaining to... instruction and assessment...It's important to look at the BIG PICTURE and problem solve ways to overcome the numerous obstacles faced in an urban setting...I do have ideas for a follow-up study (CC, 4/13, p. 1).

I view my evolution towards dealing with issues of urban education as being ongoing and perhaps a lifelong process because that's not a context from which I really hail...I will continue to read. As journals come in, this topic will be one I will gravitate to, in the same way with other items in my previous research agendas will catch my eye, because I now have some prior knowledge in it...I'll be more likely to read that material (RP, 7/30, p. 1).

This last author also expressed a desire to be more directly related to the urban field placements, which conflicts with his current assignment.

It seemed that the authors' views of their work was less as a fait accompli than as the beginning of a journey. Yet even these first tentative steps found their way into the faculty members' pedagogy.

## **Impact on Teaching**

Going beyond these initial reactions to the chapters, a number of faculty members discussed the impact of the urban education research on their teaching:

I am glad for the reading I did, and perhaps I can see ways of working with schools in Harrisburg and preparing future teachers for places like those that I wasn't fully aware of before...(MD, 4/20, p. 1).

When topics related to urban education came up [in class], I did feel as though I spoke more authoritatively on those issues, even though I would make no claims to speaking like an expert...When I spoke to students outside of class when they were considering topics for papers and so forth, I might be more inclined to steer them towards a topic like that than I have been in the past, and I might be able to react more cogently to the ideas that they have expressed that centered on urban education as a result of writing that chapter (RP, 7/30, p. 1).

I'm much more aware of the necessity to discuss certain issues in greater detail to focus on diversity within a given classroom (CC, 4/13, p. 1).

I have been discussing urban schools and prejudice more often. I have read the students excerpts from three books on teaching in the urban schools...We watched and discussed the video Eye of the Storm...I had the students participate in an activity which helped them identify some of their possible prejudices...(KS, 4/18, p. 2).

So, at this stage of the process, long before publication of the book, the project already was fulfilling one of its goals--impacting our preservice teachers. Next we turned inward, to look at the impact of the work on the faculty members, both individually and collectively.

## **Impact on the Faculty**

An unanticipated outcome of this project was its effects on faculty members personally and on the group as a whole. Our introspection related to this project affected us personally in several different ways:

...I think it's been tremendously helpful to me to force me to look at this issue that I really was looking at rather myopically from my own experiences which is a suburban experience (ST, 11/6, p. 3).

[The project has] made me more sensitive and aware of factors that I probably should have known more about all along (RP, 7/30, p. 1).

[P]erhaps this project has forced me to think about what [initiatives in my field] might really mean to me, and how it is perceived by others--and what implications this has for preparing future teachers (MD, 4/20, p. 3).

I must admit...that I feel the project has drawn me closer to the faculty . . . and I am glad for it (AH, 4/13, p. 2).

It has given me confidence in my own writing and theoretical foundation. My theories have as much value as any others. I have felt good about the association of co-authors (BN, 4/22, p. 1).

As is implied above, in some instances faculty members also perceived a collective impact on the faculty as a whole:

I think there is a new found respect among those faculty struggling with urban issues...I certainly have been pleased with the united effort. I have hoped all along that such a project would propel us into viewing the role of teacher education in multiple lights (AH, 4/13, p. 2).

It really takes a commitment on the part of the faculty if you expect real change to occur...Those people [whose commitment levels were high] will realize a change. There will be a certain transformative nature or outcome to their participation in the book project (RP, 7/30, p. 1).

On the other hand, some faculty members expressed continued frustration at not having had enough opportunity to share our insights on urban education throughout the writing process:

I really do not have a better feel for what my colleagues think (KS, 4/18, p. 1).

I am disappointed that more people didn't or couldn't take time to discuss issues as we were still writing...I don't have a very good sense of what my colleagues are writing about or doing with this project (MD, 4/20, p. 3).

One additional factor had an effect on the participating faculty members as a group. There were a few faculty members who initially had agreed to write chapters but later withdrew their participation. Other faculty members expressed "disappointment" and "sadness" at their withdrawal. When these members were approached as to why they had opted not to complete the chapters, besides lack of time, only one responded:

In prioritizing what I needed to get done, I made some decisions about what was most important to me personally and professionally. The issue, urban education, is one in which I have only marginal interest. Even though I wrote a proposal for contributing to the project, I never quite



saw how preparing [personnel] to function in urban schools was substantively different than preparing them for [the same] roles elsewhere (HD, 4/14, p. 1).

This faculty member's response may or may not reflect the viewpoints of the others who withdrew.

In order to fully realize the personal and professional impact of this project, and to fulfill the mission with which we began, the project needed to continue after the publication of the book. The following section will describe the authors' future plans with respect to urban education.

## **Next Steps**

As an indication of the influence of the project on members of the faculty, plans for further work in the area of urban education had been formulated. Faculty members were asked to share what they perceived as "next steps" for themselves and for the faculty as a whole:

I think we really need time to talk about our chapters/perspective regarding urban education and evaluate how effectively we are incorporating this in our preservice education program...I am interested in continuing to work on the topic on urban education. The next step would be to work directly (study format) on changing their [instructional] program to best meet the needs of their students and follow-up with evaluating the effectiveness of these changes based on a variety of measures focused on student learning (CC, 4/13, p. 2).

I would definitely like to follow up on the impact of our intensive urban field placement on student teaching and/or future jobs...(MD, 4/20, p. 3).

I dearly hope that the faculty goes beyond looking at the book project as an exercise that's now done, and looks at it...as a beginning step to what it is we need to do to fully honor those elements of our mission statement which are devoted to democratic societies and assisting school districts, particularly those with the kinds of problems that confront urban schools (RP, 7/30, p. 1).

I keep hoping that at some time the faculty will get together and discuss these questions which you have provided. Then we should plan how our compiled suggestions might be best implemented throughout the program. Right now I know different faculty members are trying to implement ideas into their own classes. We may be duplicating some ideas and omitting some other important ideas. When we have some idea of our plan, we should invite teachers and administrators to critique it in an open dialogue (KS, 4/18, p. 2).

I don't think everybody is cut out to be a teacher in an inner city or an urban school, but I think teacher education programs need to do a better job of making more people not just suitable for those jobs, but desirous of them (RP, 7/30, p. 2).

Thus, many of the chapter authors reaffirmed their commitment to preparing teachers for urban settings, and were already planning steps to bring that goal to fruition.

## **The Interviews**

In a final metacognitive vein, I asked the authors to analyze the impact of the interviews themselves, and their possible role in the research and writing process. Many faculty members cited the benefit of "forced reflection":

It forces reflection on this process, which I might not pay so much attention to if it were not made explicit by these interviews. I am used to reflecting on my teaching and do that regularly. I am not fond (putting it mildly) of reflecting on my writing. It is a valuable process, but I just don't like doing it (MD, 4/20, p. 3).

[The interviews] cause self-reflection which is always a positive experience for me (BN, 4/22, p. 2).

[The interviews] have provided an organized structure for my reflections regarding the process of writing this chapter. I didn't ask myself some of the questions posed here partly because I didn't know specifically what my colleagues were doing or their progress, frustrations, etc. (CC, 4/13, p. 2).

When I'm being interviewed it causes me to look inwardly in a very careful manner and try to get in touch with what I really feel about the questions that you're asking. So I think the interviews, like the book chapters, have the potential to help us discover more about where we are along this continuum of learning about urban education and then that helps give direction to making some decisions about where we ought to be and how we might want to get there...The self-reflection process in and of itself has the capacity to change us in positive directions (RP, 7/30, pp. 1-2).

[The interviews] have encouraged me to reflect on areas that I might not have otherwise. The interviews have also provided a means to express some concerns (KS, 4/18, p. 3).

In addition to the benefits derived from reflection, as this last author has noted, the interviews also served as reassurance to the authors as they were writing. Many times, usually after the tape recorder was turned off, the authors would ask me how their progress compared to that of their colleagues, express their feelings of guilt at being behind, voice their frustrations at too much to do in too little time, and check that their approach to their chapter was in accord with that of the other authors. The following comments illustrate this dialectical aspect of the interviews:

I'd like to get the Gestalt of this...Is it a worthwhile project? Is it something that's bearable? Is it doable? ...At this point we are 2 months away from handing in possibly a semi-finished product. The commitment, is it still there? Since it's an ongoing project, it has ups and downs. I'd like to know what the downs look like, as well as the ups (AH, 11/10, p. 2).

You've talked to other people, is that the way they're addressing it? (KS, 11/6, p. 3).

The following exchange between myself and one of the authors exemplifies the use of the interviews to get feedback on how one's own work fit with that of the rest of the authors:

KS:...[I]f I'm taking the perspective of preparing these preservice teachers maybe somebody else is taking more teaching the kids...

Interviewer: I think most people are [taking the perspective of] preparing the teachers...

KS: You probably know more than anybody... How much have most people written? (11/6, p. 4).

Thus, the interviews served at least two facilitative roles in the process: reflection and reassurance.

In looking back on the project, most authors were pleased that they had been able to make some concrete recommendations for teacher education based on their recent experiences in urban schools, although most recognized these as beginning steps in an ongoing process of learning about urban education. The new understandings had already begun to affect their own teaching and their own perspectives. Participating in the interviews had, for some, facilitated the crystallization of new ideas regarding urban education.

## **Conclusion**

We began this project with a sincere desire to improve education for children in urban areas and to discover what is needed to prepare effective teachers for urban environments. The project also provided an opportunity to explore an area of personal interest and to collaborate with other faculty on an initiative that was paramount for many of us. There was a good deal of anxiety and self-doubt along the way, due to the complexity and multifaceted nature of urban education and to the relative lack of experience of many of us in that field. Our commitment and intellectual curiosity carried us along and helped us to address the obstacles. We undertook various action steps to familiarize us with urban educational environments, which led to ideas regarding facilitative teaching strategies and alternate ways for children to demonstrate learning in urban schools. We recognized the impact on learning of the child's cultural and experiential background, and devised ways to develop this understanding this in our preservice teachers. At the end of this phase of the project, faculty members judged themselves to be more open-minded about urban education, more willing to discuss urban issues with their classes, and more comfortable with the urban environment. Most were committed to do further work in their area, at the very least in analyzing our teacher education program for its compatibility with our own recommendations for effective practices in urban schools. Through this epilogue, we hope that we have provided insights which will inspire other faculties to undertake similar projects.

Diatribes regarding the sorry state of public education are ubiquitous. Teachers are blamed for their students' failures, when the actual perpetrator of the problem is society at large. Apathy and the attitude that the problem is too immense and too complex for one person or one group to address only compound the problem. Through this project we acknowledged our complicity in society's crimes against children, and took small steps toward restitution. We hope that others will be heartened to begin their own journey, for the improvement of education for all children.

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### **End Note**

<sup>1</sup>All authors are identified by fictitious initials to preserve confidentiality.

### **Author Note**

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